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By E. H. Cookridge

A casual passer-by in East Berlin's Reiler Strasse may hardly cast a second glance at the three-story villa in a well-groomed garden. It is one in a long row of houses in the suburb of Friedrichsfelde, before the war a genteel if not particularly select district. Shopkeepers, well-to-do tradesmen, minor officials of the Nazi regime built their villas there. Today, the houses which survived wartime air-raids are the homes of the elite of communist German Democratic Republic.

Yet number four in Reiler Strasse is the nerve center of strange happenings, which for several years have provided frontpage headlines in the world's press.

However unassuming, the villa might yet attract attention because of the row of big cars, most of Western makes, parked in front. The most elegant of them is a large, sky-blue Mercedes 250-S coupe (price \$6200), which belongs to the owner of the house. A small brass plate at the gate indicates his name and profession: WOLFGANG VOGEL, RECHTSANWALT.

This busy solicitor is engaged in the strangest trade in the world: bartering spies. Dr. Vogel is a dapper man in his early forties, but looks youthful; about 5 feet 9 inches tall, with an athletic figure,

handsome, sunburned face, fair, slightly greying hair and sideburns. When we met him, he wore a well-cut, discreetly striped gray suit and silk tie.

It took some persuasion before he agreed to see a newspaperman. "I never give interviews to newspaper reporters," he said, "but we can have a friendly chat. Exchanging prisoners is a humanitarian hobby of mine. I've never made a brass penny out of it . . ."

He swept our reporter through a room full of waiting clients and a large office, with six pretty secretaries pounding their typewriters, into his private office, closing the upholstered, sound-proof door behind him. His sanctum is well furnished in a sombre manner; wall-to-wall carpet, covered here and there with Persian rugs, heavy curtains, deep leather chairs; the walls lined with shelves full of fat legal volumes. It could be in the chambers of any well-to-do American lawyer with the difference that on the top of one of the big oak bookcases stands a small plaster bust of Karl Marx. The empty, dead eyes of the prophet of Communism seem to gaze disapprovingly at the visitor. There is another ornament: the three monkeys, who see nothing, hear nothing and speak nothing.

Across the large, richly carved desk Dr. Vogel offers

ettes. "A present from a friend in the West," he explains with a smile. You are reminded that this is the East.

He volunteers a few details about himself, and he insists that he is not the mystery man some newspapers in the West are making of him. "I am 43 . . . I was born at Wilhelmshafen in Silesia. I am divorced from my wife and I have two children . . . From 1945 to 1952 I read law at Jena University, later at Leipzig. Then the usual legal career as a junior to a lawyer. . . ."

"Since 1954 I have my own practice. It's a very busy one; I have some 200 cases a year. It leaves me little time for my recreations, water-skiing and winter sport . . ." he says with a small sigh.

He says he is not and never was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party.

Dr. Vogel is one of only ten "free lawyers" in the German Democratic Republic, all others are employed and paid by the government. He is also one of only two East German lawyers admitted to plead before courts in the Federal Germany—as we shall see, an extremely convenient position.

"There are people in West Germany who ask me to represent them before their

courts. There are often complex cases of company law, real estate, inheritance and such like, bearing on the two German states, and here I can, of course, be of use." Dr. Vogel holds a permanent document issued by the Allied Travel Board in West Berlin, endorsed by the British, United States and French commandants. He has, of course, also the necessary paper from the East German Ministry of State Security. He can pass through the Berlin Wall any time he chooses and travel anywhere he likes in West Germany and abroad.

"I do not need to take my holiday at Karlovy Vary," he laughs. "I can go to the Cote d'Azur or Rimini, should I want it."

Yes, he knows England, he says. I recall that he was in London last year when secret negotiations for the release of the British-imprisoned Russian spies Mr. and Mrs. Peter Kroger and their exchange for Soviet held British businessman Gerald Brooke were still at an early stage, unpublished and even denied by Whitehall.

When asked whether he negotiated the Krogers-Brooke deal, Dr. Vogel said "Yes, at the beginning, but I had nothing to do with the later negotiations, which were conducted through diplomatic channels." He is anxious to repudiate any impression that he

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